The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP,

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care,

Department of Health and Social Care,

39 Victoria Street,

London,

SW1H OEU

27 February 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

**Advice and support for self-employed workers regarding Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

I am writing to you on behalf of the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self Employed (IPSE) regarding the advice and support available to the UK’s self-employed and freelance workforce in relation to COVID-19. As you may know, IPSE has 78,000 members and associates, and represents the UK’s growing and dynamic self-employed workforce.

In recent days, we have noted the publication of the government’s COVID-19 advice for employers and businesses. However, we are concerned no such similar guidance is in place for the UK’s five million self-employed people, who account for over 15% of the UK workforce. The self-employed provide vital work on a flexible basis to the public and private sectors across the country and together contribute £305bn to the economy.

The self-employed may be particularly affected by the spread of COVID-19 for several reasons. First, there is no statutory sick pay for the self-employed. We are worried that, unlike employees affected, self-isolation will mean that freelancers who are unable to turn up for work to complete projects will not be paid. Second, the incomes of freelancers and the self-employed are inherently more volatile than employees, and fluctuations can impact on their ability to cover regular payments such as rent. They will be particularly vulnerable to losses of income if there is a wider slowdown of economic activity as businesses reduce activity and restrictions on movement take place.

IPSE believes more must be done to help them and is therefore calling on government to:

* Publish specific guidance for the self-employed that provides information on the infection, how they can certify absence from work to clients, advice on coming into workplaces and support available to them
* Introduce a mitigation fund available for self-employed people who are affected by the coronavirus to cover loss of income

On this latter point, we have noted with interest similar discussions in Singapore on how to support freelancers and self-employed affected by COVID-19, including their announcement of financial reliefs for gig economy workers under quarantine. We would urge the government to look at the ongoing Budget debate in that country to see whether any of the suggested policies could be introduced here.

I would welcome a response on the above points at your earliest opportunity. If a meeting to discuss these would be of interest, then I would be happy to arrange this. I have also copied in the Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions into this correspondence.

Best wishes,

Andy Chamberlain

Deputy Director of Policy & External Affairs, IPSE

**CC: The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions**